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# Madhubala

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# Madhubala

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CHOWDHURY, ALPANA

MADHUBALA: MASTI AND MAGIC

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# Madhubala

## *Masti & Magic*

Alpana Chowdhury

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# Chapter 1

## *The Mystique of Madhubala*

*"Dekh ke nazar hum shikar ho gaye"*

More than three decades have gone by since the vivacious, sensuous, giggly Madhubala passed away. But with each new generation her legion of fans only grows larger. Even today, the male libido goes into overdrive when Madhubala swirls her skirts, flashes that million-watt smile and croons "***Aaiye meherbaan...***" in the dark, romantic ambience of the cinema hall.

# MADHUBALA

Women still emulate Madhubala. Compare any heroine today with the alluring Venus of yesteryear and she is flattered beyond words. But few have been able to match her track record of almost seventy films in less than thirty years!

Hers was the proverbial rags-to-riches story, a touching tale of love, betrayal and disappointment. While Madhubala's career soared to heights of unprecedented success, the fun-loving actress was unable to marry the man she loved, co-actor Dilip Kumar. When she did succeed in picking up the threads of her life again, to start afresh with another co-star, singer-actor Kishore Kumar, whom she married, a congenital heart disease struck a fatal blow.

Forced to give up the arc lights at a time when the grand opus, ***Mughal-E-Azam***, saw her reach the zenith of success, the versatile actress got restricted to playing only one role—that of a dying woman. For nine long years, the actress, once known as much for her infectious giggles as her acting talent, lay in bed with a script that was written many, many years ago.

# MADHUBALA

It was a script written on February 14, 1933, when wailing and kicking she entered this world. It was a script whose end could only be tragic as, in those days, medical science had not yet found a cure for a congenital heart disease.

And, when she breathed her last a few days after her thirty-sixth birthday in 1969, she was, perhaps, released from a life that had ceased to have any joy in it.

# Chapter 2

## *A Star Born*

*"Ek ladki bheegi bhaagi si..."*

When baby Mumtaz peeped out at the world for the first time on Valentine's Day, on February 14, 1933, little did she know the significant role that love and passion would play in her life. Nor did she have any inkling of the stupendous fame that would be hers even before she stepped into her adult years.

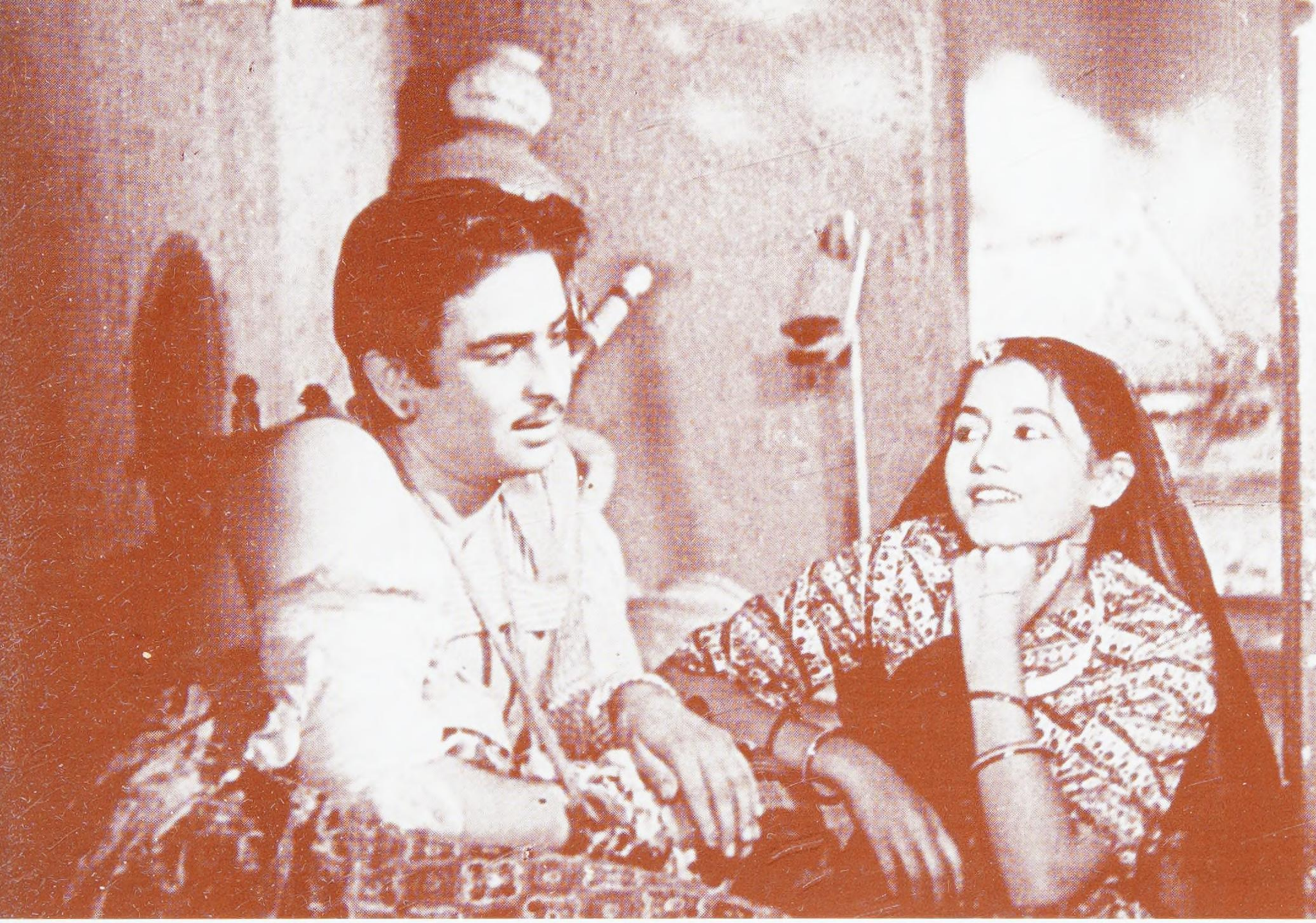
*Basant*

Born to a hot-headed Pathan, Ataullah Khan, Mumtaz was the third of six daughters, and the most beautiful of them all. When Khan gave up his job in a fit of pique, at the Imperial Tabacco Company, he turned to eight-year-old Mumtaz to keep his kitchen fire burning.

Living as they were in a ***jhopda*** adjoining the flourishing Bombay Talkies studio in Malad, a distant suburb of Bombay, Khan took his pretty little daughter to the studio's bosses, Devika Rani and Himanshu Rai, for an audition. Bombay Talkies, that had many a leading actor and actress on its payroll, quickly singed on baby Mumtaz for ***Basant***, in which she played the part of a child who brings her estranged parents together.

She was an instant hit. "***Mere chhote se man mein chhoti si duniya***", the song she sang in the film, became very popular. And overnight, the tiny tot's ***chhoti si duniya*** expanded into a very large world—the uninhibited world of celluloid fantasy, where the gleeful sound of children was replaced by a booming voice that called for Lights! Camera! Action!

Therefore, Ataullah Khan did the rounds of other studios and Mumtaz put on the pancake make up for three more films as a child artiste: ***Mumtaz Mahal, Dhanna Bhagat*** and ***Pujari***. In later years, when she recalled the 'heartbreaking effort to live and sustain one's self as a child artiste,' she revealed, "When I was eight years old... I entered the *bhool bhulaiyan* of the film industry where the first lesson is to forget one's self and everything else... so that you can act well." Hardworking and extremely diligent, the little girl won the hearts of her directors with her natural talent.



Then, one day, when she was all of thirteen years old, Kidar Sharma signed her as a heroine for ***Neel Kamal***, opposite Raj Kapoor who made his debut as a hero with this film. Sharma observed once, that of the two it was Mumtaz who was more spontaneous and intuitive. She would often act out scenes for Raj if he found them difficult. She was also very prone to fits of uncontrollable giggles, he recalled.

Confidence and laughter, in fact, would be the leitmotiv of the actress' life for some years

*Mahal*

to come. And why not? While other teenagers would be pouring over dull books, passing boring exams, Mumtaz was metamorphosing into Madhubala, the star. Rechristened as Madhubala by Devika Rani, she went on to seduce millions of viewers with her lopsided smile.

Earning lakhs of rupees for her father, the youngster acted oppsite dashing young heroes like Surendra, Sapru, Suresh and, yes, highly-educated ones like Ashok Kumar and Dev

Anand. *Chittor Vijay, Dil Ki Rani, Lal Dupatta, Dulari, Mahal, Paras, Singaar*... between 1947 and 1949, she had a phenomenal number of releases. Seventeen films in two years!

Undeterred by her own lack of education and modest background, Madhubala was able to hold her own against these actors, matching them word for word, expression for expression. Spontaneity was her forte but the young Madhu continued to be extremely industrious as well, never taking her status or success for granted. And so, though she never had any formal education, with the studio being her classroom, she decided that she must learn English to be really on par with her colleagues.

Every day, after pack-up, she would dutifully trot off to Sushila Rani Devi's house at George's Court, on Warden Road, to learn conversational English. By this time, the Khans had shifted to the upmarket Peddar Road. Sushila Rani, whose husband, Baburao Patel, published the magazine, *Film India*, recounts how her star pupil mastered the art of speaking the Queen's language in just three months. "She was my most brilliant student!" she declares, her eyes lighting up even now with appreciation.

She is equally fulsome in her praise of Madhubala's beauty. "When her father brought her to me the first time, I thought an *apsara*

had descended from heaven. She was wearing no make-up—her dazzling smile and lovely olive complexion required no artificial aid. She was well-built and a complete natural. With a woman's figure and an innocent face, she set the screen on fire with this potent combination."

"The two of us struck a great rapport that went beyond a teacher-student relationship. I was a few years older than her, so she called me *didi*. She kept in touch with me throughout her life, even though her father, later, forbade her to meet me."

It was Baburao Patel who first described Madhubala as the Venus of the Indian screen—a tag that often overshadowed the fact that she was a multi-faceted actress as well.

Whether she played the ethereal tantaliser of ***Mahal***, the efficient reporter-on-the-move of K***aala Paani***, the mischievous tease of ***Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*** or the angst-ridden beloved of Prince Salim in ***Mughal-E-Azam***, Madhubala carried along audiences with her seemingly effortless performances. Though uneducated, the actress seemed to understand her characters instinctively, imbuing each with a distinct personality of its own. Never did she appear jaded or mechanical.

For ***Mahal***, directed by Kamal Amrohi and released in 1949, Ashok Kumar, the film's hero wanted a



*Chalti ka Naam Gadi*

heroine who had touch-me-not beauty. "She had to be a woman and a spirit rolled into one, extraordinarily beautiful yet unattainable for most part of the film," he explained. When Bombay Talkies, which produced the film, selected its erstwhile child star Mumtaz for the role, Ashok Kumar asked the cameraman to enhance her beauty even more through creative camera techniques.

With ***Mahal***, Madhubala tasted her first major success as a heroine. Playing a simple gardener's daughter, Madhubala not only haunted the hero with her mysterious, fleeting appearances, but has left several generations of cinema audiences mesmerised by her performance. The faraway look in her eyes as she sways gently on the garden swing, singing "***Ayega aanewala... ayega***", before fading away into the mists, is one of the most enduring images of Indian cinema. And the song still continues to resonate in the psyche of music lovers even half a century later.

Madhubala's beauty may have got her the role in ***Mahal***, but Ashok Kumar subsequently discovered that she was also extremely quick on the uptake as an actress. "In ***Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi***, there is a scene when I ask her to leave my brother and she retaliates spiritedly. But while she is rendering her dialogue, I interrupt to assert 'Now, you listen to

me'. This was not there in the original script. I had said it on the spur of the moment. However, Madhu did not get flustered. She continued with her lines, unfazed. The scene turned out to be more effective because of this," reminisced the actor, known to be a fastidious co-star.

Madhubala was just seventeen when she played the unlettered village belle in *Tarana*, who wins the heart of an England-returned doctor with her naïve, child-like ways. "*Nain mile, nain tere baware*", sings her beloved, played by Dilip Kumar, and the two are swept along on a tide of emotions they cannot check.

As the film progressed, Ataullah Khan's daughter found that, despite efforts to the contrary, she was getting hopelessly drawn towards her soft-spoken co-star.

His charm was working as much before the camera as behind it. "*Ab ruke na preet ki yeh naav re*" lip-synced the two under Ram Daryani's direction, but the song was fast becoming the theme of their lives as well. It is difficult to say whether it was the high-intensity scenes of the film that drew the two together or whether it was their budding off-screen love affair that lent their on-screen romance its intensity. Whatever the reason, *Tarana* showed, very early, the potential that Madhubala possessed as an actress, and her ability to slip into the skin of the characters that directors conceived for her.

Dev Anand, Madhubala's hero in many a delightful film, including one called *Madhubala*, also speaks highly of her talent. "She was attractively turned-out and gave the impression of being sophisticated. That's why Navketan, our production company, found her suitable for the smart reporter in *Kaala Paani*. She never over-rehearsed. She would act and I would react or vice versa. That's how delightful numbers like '*Achchha ji main haari, chalo maan jaao na*', took shape."

Once, however, the bubbly actress' talent did not quite rise to the occasion. This was the time when, in her personal life, her love affair with actor Dilip Kumar was at its peak. She was shooting for Guru Dutt's ***Mr. And Mrs. 55*** at Mehboob Studio. Abrar Alvi, the film's scriptwriter, narrates the incident, "The scene to be shot had Lalita Pawar showing Madhubala a photograph of her husband in a compromising position with another woman. It was a ruse to make the heroine sue for divorce."

*Mr. & Mrs. 55*

"Since we didn't have the relevant photograph at the time of the shoot we borrowed a photograph, of same size, from Mehoob Khan's office, with the intention of inserting the right later on. Now, it so happened that the one we borrowed was a photograph of Dilip Kumar. When Madhu saw it she just refused to do the scene. 'I can't concentrate,' she pleaded. 'please get another photograph.' No amount of cajoling helped. Ultimately, we had to do as she wished."

On this occasion, the actress may have got completely distracted by Dilip Kumar's photograph but when she faced the camera with him in person she gave her best. K. Asif's ***Mughal-E-Azam*** which took ten long years to be made is, perhaps, one of the most passionate films of Hindi cinema, in no small measure due to Madhubala's searing performance.

Her coquettish expression as she seduced the heir-apparent of the Mughal throne with "*Mohe panghat pe Nandlal ched gayo re*", the fire in her eyes as she defiantly sings "*Pyar kiya to darna kya*" and the pure angst as she cries "*Mohabbat ki jhooti kahani pe roye*", while being dragged to the dungeons in chains, show the entire range of emotions of a star-crossed beloved. There were long gaps between the shooting schedules when the film nearly got stalled, but the actress got the continuity of expression perfectly, conveying the graph of Anarkali's character just right.

*Mughal-E-Azam*

Yet, it was not as if Madhubala was just transferring on-screen what she felt in reality for her hero, because she and Dilip Kumar broke up during the course of the film's making. And, it is said, the actor did not behave very graciously towards her. After that things reached such a state of bitterness between them that she would take along one of her other directors to K. Asif's sets to hold the thespian's anger in check. Despite such rancour, Madhubala had to gaze at him with intense longing when the camera was switched on, and this was, perhaps, her greatest *tour de force*.

The romantic scene in the bower, when Prince Salim strokes Anarkali's face with a feather, to the strains of Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's music in the background, is one of Hindi cinema's most sensuous scenes. But who can tell whether the passion the lead pair were displaying on screen may have been quite contrary to what they had begun feeling in real life.

Even as Madhubala acted in this period film, projecting the nuances of a bygone era, the versatile actress faced the camera for contemporary subjects as well. Mouthing the

sophistication of literary Urdu one day and the hybrid flavour of anglicised Hindi the next, for *Howrah Bridge*—she managed both, equally convincingly, with chameleon-like ease.

The different shades of sensuality that she expressed in these two films also showed what a consummate artiste she was. The alluring vulnerability of a *kaneez* in a Mughal court, on the one hand, and the come-hither mannerisms of an Edna as she swayed seductively to an "*Aaiye meherbaan*", in a night club, in *Howrah Bridge*, on the other—she projected both kinds of feminine charm with devastating effect.

Shakti Samanta, who directed her in *Howrah Bridge*, in the year 1958, recalls that he did not have to labour with her over her role as Edna. "I

was at one time with Bombay Talkies where I had seen how talented she was, so I had no hesitation in casting her as an Anglo-Indian girl. All I told her by way of a brief was that she had to behave and talk like an Anglo-Indian. I would read our her lines to her.... "*Tum kya bolta hai...humko kuch samajh mein nahin aata hai*"—that sort of thing—and she would get the lilt and intonation perfectly. She was a very intelligent girl and understood Edna's character without any difficulty. I even left the costume designing to her."

"We shot the entire film here in Natraj Studio, which was then known as Modern Studio. Simultaneously, she would be shooting at Mohan Studio, further up the road, for ***Mughal-E-Azam***. I would drop in there to brief her for my film. And no, she had no problem switching off from one era and switching on to another. She was a very fine artiste and adapted to different styles very easily."

Shakti Samanta next cast her in ***Insaan Jaag Utha*** in which she played a labourer. "We shot a major portion of the film on location, at the Nagarjunasagar dam which was under construction. Madhu had to shoot scenes walking barefoot on stones, but she never complained. There was no hotel there, so we stayed in camps put up for the site engineers. Sunil Dutt, the hero of my film, would wake us up at 5 a.m. by blowing a bugle and Madhu, Minoo Mumtaz and their respective sisters would go to the community kitchen to supervise the making of breakfast for everybody. We were like one big family and Madhu never expected to be given any special treatment."

"She was very attached to her work. Even in Bombay, she would always be ready and on the sets by 9:30 a.m. Never fussy, she did her hair herself and donned minimum make-up. But she would always pack up by 6:30 in the evening. If we required her beyond that time, we would have to take her father's permission. Yes, even after she got married, this rule remained."

With Guru Dutt's ***Mr. And Mrs. 55***, Madhubala had ventured into comedy. Guru Dutt had signed her on because she was such a saleable star. Though she was not so sure about her ability to carry off a comic role, scriptwriter Abrar Alvi convinced her that she could do it. based on one of Alvi's successful plays, ***Modern Marriage***, ***Mr. And Mrs. 55***, introduced a new genre to both Madhubala and Guru Dutt.

***Mr. And Mrs. 55*** was about a contract marriage between Guru Dutt, a jobless cartoonist, and Madhubala, who could inherit her father's wealth only if she married within a month of his death. With a man-hating aunt, played with much gusto by

*Mr. & Mrs. 55*

*Begasoor*

Lalita Pawar, the film unfolds through a series of understandings and misunderstandings, to reach a happy climax.

A little known fact is that, Madhubala was the original heroine of Guru Dutt's ***Pyaasa***. Several reels were even canned with her. But then, the whimsical Guru Dutt changed the story and remade the film with Mala Sinha and Waheeda Rehman.

Very satisfied with the way Guru Dutt's unit brought out the comic streak in her in ***Mr. And Mrs. 55***, Madhubala then toyed with the idea of directing a comedy herself and asked Abrar Alvi to script one for her. "But," says Alvi, "the film never took off because she was too preoccupied with her acting assignments. Besides, she also began doing the Kishore Kumar brand of comedy. Along the way, the two got married. So she didn't have the time to direct a film."

A contract makes an appearance even in Devendra Goel's ***Ek Saal*** (1957), starring Madhubala and Ashok Kumar. But in this case the playboy hero is signed on by the heroine's father to court her. The father wants to ensure love and laughter for his daughter since she has only a year more to live.

Kishore Kumar and Madhubala first came together in the riotous ***Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi***, which was released in 1958. They got married soon after. In this film, the fun-loving actress projected yet

*Mr. & Mrs. 55*

another kind of sensuous appeal. Dripping wet clad in sheer chiffon saree, sneezing clumsily, she lands up in a garage in the middle of the night and arrogantly demands that her car be repaired immediately.

Playing a spunky, spoilt, rich brat, Renu, Madhubala's sensuality in this scene is heightened by the fact that the hero is impervious to it. She is all woman but the irrepressible Kishore Kumar dismisses her as a mad "*ladki, bheegi bhaagi si*". Quite unmoved by her physicality or her plight, he continues tinkering with his tools, nonchalantly singing "*Tan geela hai, man bheega hai, uska koi pech bhi dheela hai.*"

Only an actress as spontaneous as Madhubala could match the madness of Kishore. The undercurrent of romance between a haughty damsel-in-distress and a simpleton car mechanic, in a place as unromantic as a garage, was so effective because of the genius of these two artistes. Countless filmmakers have, since then, drenched their heroines, but no one has ever looked as irresistible as Madhubala.

Kishore Kumar and Madhubala then happily co-starred in one fun-filled caper after another—like *Jhumroo* and *Half*

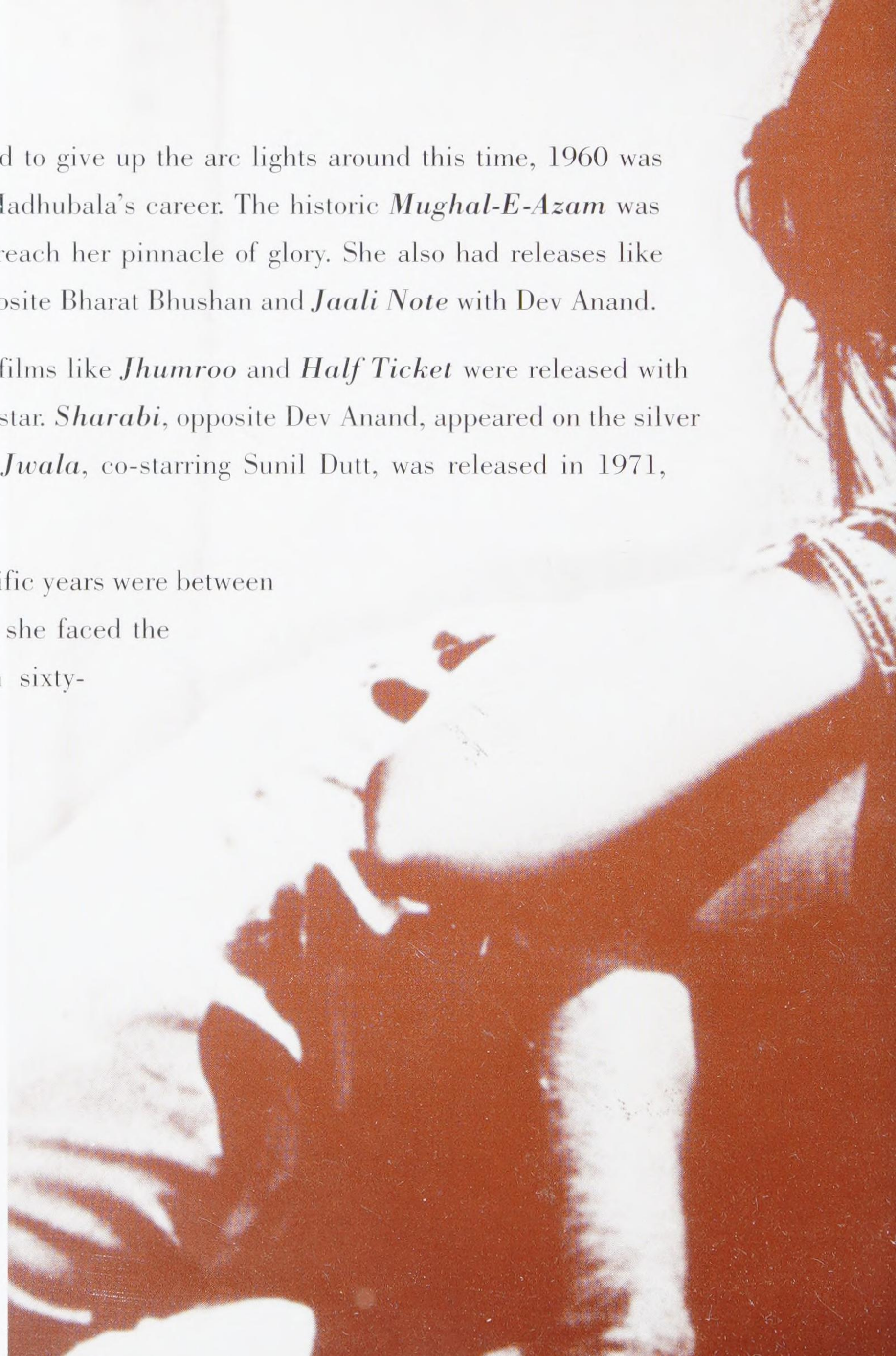
*Ticket*. Shakti Samanta relates how he had to abandon a story on coal miners, which he had planned with Madhubala because her husband insisted on acting in it. "I told Kishore he was not suited for the film. He said, 'Then change the script.' So I took a comedy—*Naughty Boy*—which I didn't like much, just to accommodate Kishore."

The film, unfortunately, never got completed as Madhubala fell ill during its making, after ten reels had been canned. The songs and climax remained to be picturised, but the doctors would allow her only seven more days of shooting. So, Madhubala could wrap up only those films that were almost complete. After three years, Samanta re-shot Naughty Boy with another heroine but lost a lot of money on it.

Though Madhubala had to give up the arc lights around this time, 1960 was a memorable year in Madhubala's career. The historic ***Mughal-E-Azam*** was released and saw her reach her pinnacle of glory. She also had releases like ***Barsaat Ki Raat*** opposite Bharat Bhushan and ***Jaali Note*** with Dev Anand.

In the years 1961-62, films like ***Jhumroo*** and ***Half Ticket*** were released with her husband as the co-star. ***Sharabi***, opposite Dev Anand, appeared on the silver screen in 1964 while ***Jwala***, co-starring Sunil Dutt, was released in 1971, much after her death.

Madhubala's most prolific years were between 1947 and 1960, when she faced the camera for more than sixty-five films!



# Chapter 3

## *Passion and Pain*

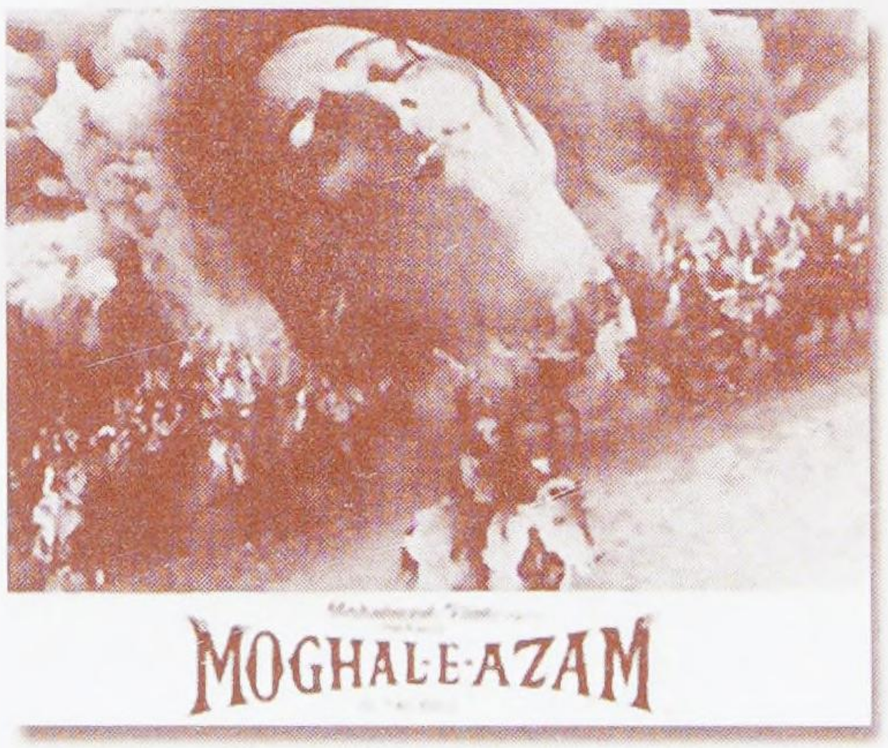
*"Mohabat ki jhooti kahani pey roye*

*Badi chote khayi, jawani pe roye....."*

The stunning beauty that she was, Madhubala had captivated audiences with her expressive eyes, mischievous giggles, lopsided smile, half-husky whispers and impish sensuality. Success followed her devotedly, but her personal life was tumultuous, to say the least. Her legendary romance with Dilip Kumar was the source of much heart-break and anguish.

Theirs was a torrid and volatile love affair, with all the elements of passion, jealousy, possessiveness, hurt and betrayal.

Like many child artistes, who have no life beyond the sights and sounds of a studio, Madhubala grew and blossomed before the camera but continued to follow the strict regulations of an iron-handed father. The heart within the child-woman, however, beat to its own rhythm. And when it skipped a beat at the sight of the dark, handsome hero of her film *Tarana*, there was little she could do about it.



Slowly but surely, the relationship between her and Dilip Kumar reached a fevered pitch. Meeting as they were on the set of one film after another—*Sangdil*, *Amar* and the forever-in-the-making, *Mughal-E-Azam*—Dilip and Madhubala got inexorably drawn together. They found ways and means of meeting each other, away from Ataullah Khan's disapproving eye—sometimes in Sushila Rani's house, sometimes in her make-up room.

Abrar Alvi remembers how the actor would visit her at Mehboob Studio where they were shooting for Guru Dutt's *Mr. and Mrs. 55*. "She would take very long to snap out of her reverie after he paid her a visit. When assistant directors would fail to bring her down from her make-up room, Guru

Dutt would send me to fetch her for her shot. She would be lost in her own world and mumble vague replies and I would have to scold her to bring her back to reality."

But young as she was, being only seventeen when she met Dilip, Madhubala tantalised him by flirting with other co-stars. Premnath, with whom she acted in ***Badal*** and ***Saqi*** was said to be one of her romantic involvement and made Dilip Kumar see red. But these were passing fancies that didn't create any serious dents in their relationship. As Sushila Rani points out, "She was at an age when it is normal for girls to have crushes. I don't think she was promiscuous as some uncharitable biographers have made her out to be."

What did create serious problems between the two was Ataullah Khan's unbending attitude towards his daughter's career and Dilip Kumar's equally unbending condition that she should sever relations with her family once they got married.

Things came to a boil in 1957, when B.R. Chopra

signed Madhubala and Dilip Kumar for *Naya Daur*. A grand mahurat was held of the film followed by a ten-day shooting schedule in Bombay. Chopra speaks of the enthusiasm with which Madhubala would report on the dot at 9 a.m. for her work and how she wouldn't leave the set unless 'lunch' or 'pack-up' was announced. "In the evenings she and Dilip would sit in the car chatting for a while. They were good friends and our schedule went off very smoothly," he relates.

Trouble erupted when Chopra approached Ataullah Khan for Madhubala's dates for a 45-day schedule to be shot in Bhopal followed by another one in Poona. Khan refused to let his daughter go out of Bombay citing ill-health as the reason. (Yet, in later years, he allowed her to shoot for *Insaan Jaag Utha*, in far more difficult circumstances, out of Bombay.) No amount of reasoning could make him relent.

Chopra pointed out to him that when discussing the film with Madhubala, before signing her, he had apprised her of the outdoor shoots. But Khan was

adamant. Everyone knew that the real reason for him not letting his daughter go out of Bombay was Dilip Kumar. He did not want to give them opportunity to spend endless hours together.

Finally, Chopra decided to drop Madhubala from his film. He signed on Vyjantimala instead and issued advertisements in the press to this effect. The ads had Madhubala's name crossed out and Vyjantimala's name printed above it! This angered the Khan no end. Furious at being thus snubbed, he went to court against Chopra.

Chopra defended himself spiritedly, with Dilip Kumar supporting him and giving evidence against Madhubala and her father. Chopra declared that his film could not be made without the Bhopal schedule. "The judge," narrates Chopra, "was a very down-to-earth person. He said he

*Neel Kamal*

would reserve his judgement till he had seen my film, to find out if what I had said was true."

"I remember," continues Chopra, "Dilip and I had gone to see the very first show of the film at Liberty cinema. After the film, as we were coming out, we saw the judge also descending the stairs. We went up to him and he praised us profusely. 'Madhubala,' he said, 'lost out on a very good role.' And yes, he agreed that the Bhopal schedule was essential."

The judgement went in Chopra's favour but he did not demand any action against Madhubala. "Let the girl be," he told the court even though he had spent a lakh of rupees on the case and another large amount on the film's first schedule.

Chopra, who had first seen the actress on screen in *Neel Kamal*, did not harbour any harsh feelings towards her and always remained very fond of her. "It was as a

*Neel Kamal*

journalist that I had seen *Neel Kamal* and I had praised Madhubala very highly in my article on the film. Till today I maintain she was a very gifted artiste. She was also a very good human being. Even while the case was in court, she visited me and spoke very nicely with me. But she was helpless before her father's dictates."

Ironically, or rather funnily, after so much acrimony, Ataullah Khan had the audacity to approach Chopra with a story that he wanted Chopra to direct! Chopra politely, but firmly, showed him the door.

Foolish? Ambitious? Selfish? Was Ataullah Khan a little of all this? If people tolerated him it was because of his good-natured daughter and the fact that she was a major star. But Dilip Kumar was different. Not being dependent on the Khan for Madhubala's dates, he may have seen no reason to tolerate his idiosyncrasies. Eventually, torn between two strong-headed men, it was the young and in love Madhu who suffered. The girl, who was known to be in love with love itself, had to give up the man she adored for an insensitive father who would not let go of his golden goose.

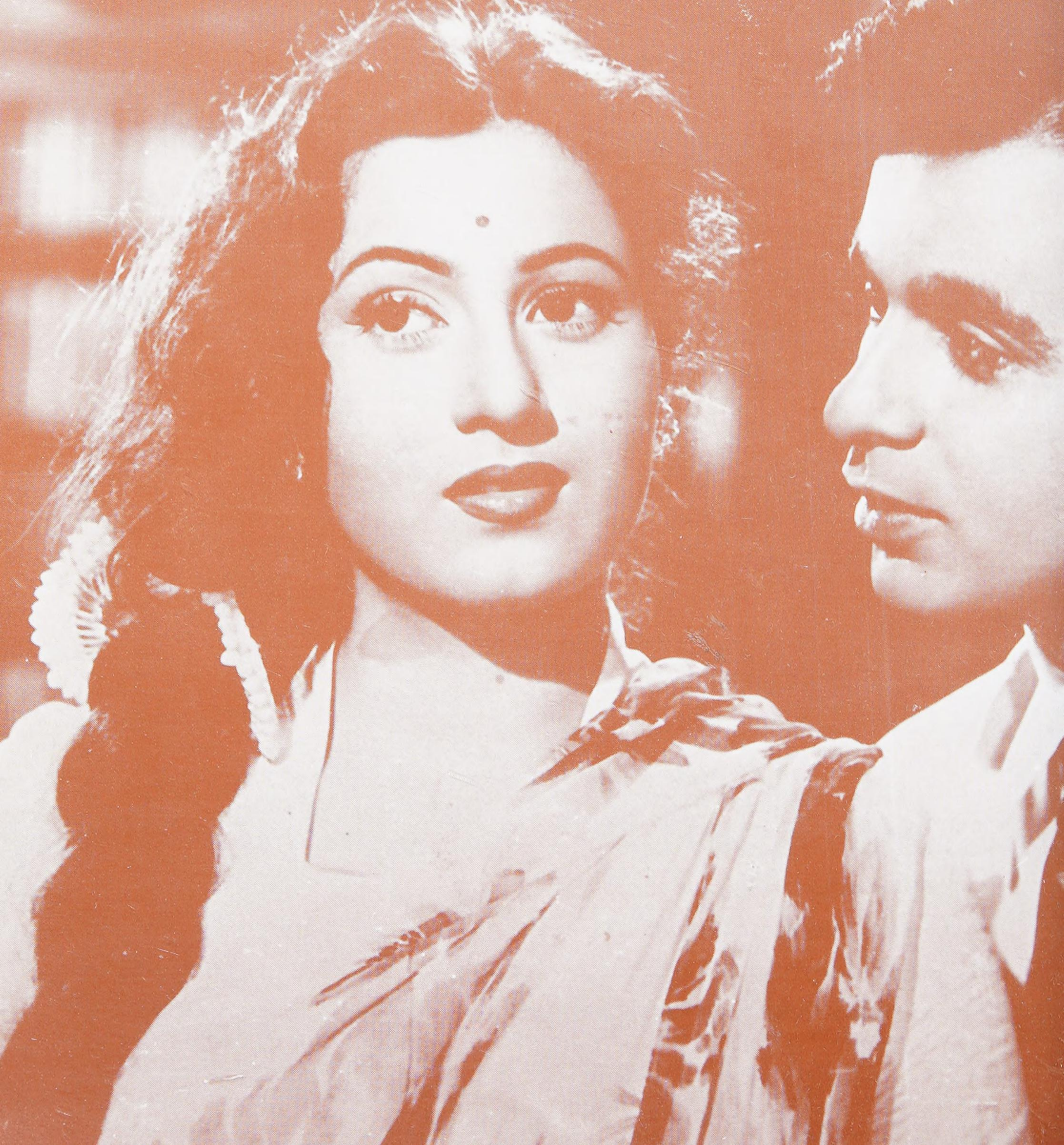
At twenty four, when she yearned to enjoy the small, sweet pleasures of matrimonial bliss, the star-crossed actress found herself loveless and forlorn. Worshipped by a nation of movie-buffs, Madhubala, herself, was lonely and heart-broken. No wonder, her one desire, as she often confided to a close friend, was to die as a married woman. "*Bhabhi main shaadi-shuda marna chahti hoon*," was her plaintive refrain.

*Sangdil*

Thus, it is quite possible, that she married Kishore Kumar on the rebound. At least, her sisters believe this was so. Mrs Devendra Goel, whose husband directed Madhubala in ***Ek Saal***, remembers the time when Madhubala and Kishore Kumar came to visit

her at St Elizabeth's nursing home, where one of the actress' sisters was also undergoing treatment. "When I teased her about Kishore, she blushed and buried her face in her hands. But after they left, one of her sisters asked if I had noticed that she still wore Dilip Kumar's ring."

There are many versions as to what brought Kishore and Madhubala together. According to one director, she told him that what she liked about the funster was that he never tried to get physically intimate with her, but proposed marriage straightaway. According to others, it was she who proposed to him, nursing as she was a broken heart after Dilip Kumar and she had split. Kishore, too, was a troubled man in those days as his marriage to Rumadevi had just been annulled. Whatever the reason,



the actor and actress got married quietly, through a civil registration ceremony, much to the surprise of family members and friends alike.

Sadly, the marriage did not work. Again, there are varied versions as to why the actress returned to her father's house within weeks of signing on the dotted line. Some reveal that she confided to them about how unbearable she found Kishore's miserly habits. But there are others who find this hard to believe. Abrar Alvi speaks in glowing terms of Kishore's large-heartedness. "He never defaulted on payments and always paid generously. He was a very hospitable man and treated me to extravagant spreads, which included special Bengali sweets. Madhu went back to her father's house because her weak heart could not take the loud noise of the aeroplanes that flew low over Kishore's house which was very close to the airport."

*Chalti ka Naam Gadi*

Leena Chandavarkar, whom the actor married in later years, corroborates Alvi's version, "Kishore was a very good human being. He helped a lot of people but believed that to speak of one's charitable deeds was in bad taste. The reason why Madhubala went back

to her father's house was the noise of the planes. When a plane flies over the house even the windows rattle, so the noise was more than her weak heart could bear."

It is quite possible that the actress never gave up loving Dilip Kumar, and she made excuses to justify going back to her parental home. Many believed that she used Kishore to get over Dilip and never really loved Kishore. Perhaps that is why even those working closely with them had no inkling of an affair between them. Ashok Kumar, Kishore's brother and Madhubala's hero of several films, claimed he knew nothing of their relationship till they got married.

Kishore Kumar's golden voice contributed to Dev Anand's romantic image in film after film, but even Dev did not know that his voice was to marry the heroine of his films like ***Nadaan*** and ***Nirala***. "Kishore's life was very isolated. We met only at recordings. I had no idea that he and Madhu were friendly," he explains.

Leena Chandavarkar observes that her husband was basically a very shy man and that it was Madhu who proposed to him during the making of that mischievous

number, "*Hal kaisa hai janab ka*". "He was a very simple man. She would bring food from home for him and, maybe, little gestures like that drew him to her," she reasons.

The actress might have sought solace in the comic actor's simple, undemanding ways but marriage was a different issue altogether. Her sisters blame him for neglecting her, but who can tell what really went wrong between husband and wife?

To give Kishore Kumar his due, it must be said he did his utmost to cure his wife of her congenital heart problem. That she had a weak heart, had been discovered many years prior to her meeting Kishore, during

the time when she went to Sushila Rani's home for English tuitions. Sushila Rani recalls that it was her family doctor, P.V. Manglik, who first diagnosed Madhubala as having a congenital heart disease. However, for reasons best known to the family, this fact was not disclosed to the outside world. She continued acting in films and even shot strenuous scenes like those in ***Mughal-E-Azam*** where she rode pillion on a horse through the heat and dust of battle.

It was only many years later in 1959, when she fainted during the shooting of Muhafiz Haider's ***Mahalon Ke Khwab***, in Mahabaleshwar, that Madhubala was taken to well-known cardiologist Dr Jal Vakil. Haider, who directed the film for Madhubala Productions Pvt. Ltd., narrates how

they rushed back to Bombay. "Dr Vakil pronounced that she had a congenital heart problem, for which there was no cure in those days. His advice was, 'No emotional stress, no spicy food'. What he prescribed for her was, 'Boiled food, fruits and lots of laughter'.

"Though Dr Vakil saw no point in Madhu going abroad for treatment, Kishore Kumar, her husband, insisted on taking her to England for a second medical opinion. The couple was terrified of flying but after many prayers and ***mannats*** they summoned the courage to go. They also persuaded Dr Vakil to go with them. Kishore paid him Rs. 10,000 a day as fees for this period. But, as Dr Vakil had predicted, the doctors in England only reiterated what he had already told them."

The remaining scenes of Haider's film were completed with Madhubala's sister, Chanchal, stepping in for her. After this, there was no question of Madhubala signing any new contracts. With a doctor on the sets, she completed some of her pending films, including ***Mughal-E-Azam***.

Chapter 4

# Curtain Call

*"Zakhmon se bhara seena hai mera..."*

Though the medical fraternity did not give her much time, the actress lived for nine years after her trip to England. But these were years that played havoc on her mind. Since excitement of any kind had been forbidden by the doctors, a normal, marital relationship was out of the question and Kishore's absences from her side drove her mad.

Having got accustomed to stardom and adulation, she found it difficult to lead a life away from the arc lights. She would phone friends and colleagues, begging them to visit her. When Sushila Rani went to see her, the actress hugged her tight and sent a message for Baburao Patel, "Tell Uncle, it is never too late to visit the sick." Tears spring to Sushila Rani's eyes as she remembers this incident, even though decades have passed since then.

Shakti Samanta, too, is visibly moved when he recalls how he got a phone call from her saying, "I want to meet you. Please come!"

"When I went over, I found her very thin and unwell but with full make-up on. I asked her, 'Madhu, why are you wearing make-up?' And she replied, 'Shakti, you have seen me in my best form. I could not let you see me as I am today.' I found it difficult to check my tears. Such a fabulous person, such a great artiste and she was talking like this! She was very depressed."

It was in this same room that years ago, Samanta had first gone to narrate the story of ***Howrah Bridge*** to her. "She wouldn't stop giggling. So I had to tell her, 'Madam, if you don't stop laughing, I cannot tell you the story. You are making me nervous'," relates Samanta. She was a star then, while Samanta was an upcoming director. Madhubala stopped her laughter, heard the story and said an immediate 'yes'. Her father took only one rupee and four annas as the signing amount. "The rest," he said, "you pay a week before the film goes on the floors."

*Howrah Bridge*

Now, it saddened Samanta to see the same star, bedridden, with an oxygen cylinder as her permanent companion, conscious of fading looks that earlier required no rouge or pancake.

*Tarana*

It was a sad juncture in a life, which may have begun in penury but had seen glorious days thereafter. From the ***jhopda*** in Malad to a house in Peddar Road to a large bungalow, Arabian Villa, in Bandra—Madhubala had seen it all. Not only did her lifestyle improve dramatically, but her earnings also saw her entire family well settled.

Large hearted and generous, the actress believed it was not fair to be indifferent to the sufferings of others. From sharing her home-cooked food with nervous first time directors to offering financial aid to down-and-out ones, Madhubala believed that since God has been good to her, she should be good to others.

Once, when she gave a cheque of Rs. 50,000 to Morarji Desai for cyclone relief, he gave her and Sushila Rani the licences for revolvers. "Morarji *bhai* believed that women should be strong and know self-defence, so he made us pass the tests for getting the licences. Both Madhu and I were able to clear the tests," Sushila Rani states with pride.

Ungrudgingly, the star indulged her father's half-baked schemes. The ambitious Khan foolishly sank money in one aborted film after another but, obedient daughter that she was, Madhubala never protested. Only once did she excuse herself from one of his hare-brained projects, when he decided to direct a film himself. On the pretext that she would not be comfortable doing romantic scenes in front of her ***abba***, she got out of acting in ***Pathan***.

*Beqasoor*

As has often happened, down the years, when hawk-eyed mothers and fathers have prevented their star-daughters from leading lives of their own, the studio was for Madhubala her workplace and playground. She extracted her moments of pleasure before the clock struck six. "She was quite a tease," remarks Dev Anand. "Extremely playful, she would egg you on and then hold back." He describes her as a schoolgirlish tomboy, a little immature, just stepping into her teens. "She would burst into peals of laughter for no particular reason and we would have to wait till her laughter subsided."

Mrs Devendra Goel, too, speaks of her fun-loving spirit. "Our much-married publicist was crazy about her," she relates. "Madhu knew this and, sportingly, allowed the unit to tease him about her. During one schedule of *Ek Saal*, she had to sing the song '*Sub kuch loota ke hosh mein aye*...' and run up a flight of stairs. A platform had been erected at the end of the stairs, out of the camera's range, where she had to stop. Our publicist was asked to wait there to hold her in case she tripped."

*Mr. & Mrs. 55*

"The camera rolled, she ran up… and then deliberately threw herself into his arms. The poor guy never recovered from this encounter! Till the end, he remained smitten by her and even dreamt of marrying her!!"

Abrar Alvi has a similar incident to recount. "We were shooting a song for *Mr. and Mrs. 55* in Ghodbunder, on the outskirts of Bombay. I had been dragged along by Guru Dutt even though my presence, as a scriptwriter, was not really required. It was a very hot day so I made myself comfortable under a tree. Suddenly, I was startled out of my comatose mood by a female voice... '***Maan liya, jaga bahut khoob dhoondi hai....***' It was Madhubala who came and sat down next to me, tantalisingly close. Being from a typical, orthodox Muslim background, I was most uneasy with her proximity and extremely conscious of the unit's eyes on us. But she was least aware of all this."

This was the star's way of enjoying lighter moments even as she slogged to fill her father's coffers. Was she promiscuous, as some have made her out to be, or simply playful, seeking an escape from her regimented life?

Mrs Goel, like Sushila Rani, believes the actress was guileless, innocent. "If she was promiscuous, she was like the clear and flowing river whose water does not get sullied because lions and deer drink from it."

There are others who remember her for her impulsive, fun-loving ways. Shakuntala Widge was a family friend and about the same age as the actress. "She used to call my husband ***bhaiya*** and me ***bhabhi***," she relates, with affection. "Her father was very strict so she would use my husband as an alibi to indulge in innocent pleasures like going for a walk on the beach. Once, we went to Carter Road, by the sea, in Bandra. The sun was setting on the horizon, and we were enjoying the cool breeze as we strolled along on the kerb."

"Suddenly, a bunch of young boys recognised her. Sharp as she was, Madhu quickly turned to me and put up a little act. Patting her collar in mock pride, she loudly exclaimed, '***Bhabhi, bhabhi***, look these boys think I am Madhubala! Isn't that great?' Fooled by her act, the boys turned away in disappointment, saying '***Arre yeh woh nahin hain***'."

"Another time," continues Mrs Widge, "she wanted to see a night show. Her father used to book three entire rows if his daughter went to the theatre so that she would have no stranger sitting anywhere near her. Now, she knew he would never let her go for a night show, so she made my husband take permission from her father. Of course, she took the precaution of wearing a ***burqa***."

"I remember, there was one very solemn scene in the film in which an old man was dying. Madhu turned to me giggling, '*Bhabhi*, now you know what will happen? That *diya* will flicker to the left and then to the right and go off. Simultaneously, the old man will die.' That is exactly what happened! Instead of shedding tears, we were laughing." Perhaps, aware that she was living on borrowed time, the young actress lived life as fully as she could, finding ways to entertain herself even in the most serious situations.

Sometimes, she would sneak off to Mrs Widge's house during a break in the shooting and ask her to make *pakoras*. "Because of her heart problem, she was not allowed to eat fried food. But sometimes she would give in to temptation when her father was not around," narrates Mrs Widge.

However, when the laughter-loving actress got restricted to the four walls of her room, her bravest efforts failed to elevate her mood. Depression, insecurity, jealousy gnawed into her and she breathed her last as a very lonely woman.

*Dulari*

In an interview that appeared in *The Asian Age* newspaper, Kidar Sharma revealed that a few days before her death she had sent for him. "It was heart-rending," he said, "to see the woman celebrated as the Venus of India in that state. She was sinking, but there was a calm in her eyes. 'It's a relief I am dying,' she said. 'I have been let down at every step of the way... cheated.' Her eyes glistered with tears. That was the last time I saw her."

Today, there is little by way of a memorial to her. Her bungalow has long been demolished and an ugly multi-storeyed building stands in its place. If she lives on, it is in the sepia-tinted memory of friends, fans and colleagues who remember her with warmth and affection. And through her films. Films that project time and again, the masti and magic, the laughter and tears, the agony and ecstasy of an actress whose life got snuffed out just a few days after her thirty-sixth birthday, on February 23, 1969.

# Filmography

Madhubala's films as a child artiste

1942—*Basant*

1944—*Mumtaz Mahal*

1945—*Dhanna Bhagat*

1945—*Pujari*

As a heroine

1947—*Neel Kamal* with Raj Kapoor

1947—*Chittor Vijay* with Surendra

1947—*Dil Ki Rani* with Raj Kapoor

1947—*Khubsurat Duniya* with Wasti

1947—*Mere Bhagwan* with Surendra

1948—*Amar Prem* with Raj Kapoor

1948—*Parai Aag* with Ulhas

1948—*Lal Dupatta* with Sapru

1949—*Apradhi* with Ram Singh

1949—*Daulat* with Mahipal

1949—*Dulari* with Suresh

1949—*Imtihan* with Surendra

1949—*Mahal* with Ashok Kumar

1949—*Neki Aur Badi* with Kidar Sharma

1949—*Paras* with Rehman

1949—*Singaar* with Jairaj

1949—*Sipahiya* with Agha

1950—*Beqasoor* with Ajit

1950—*Hanste Ansu* with Motilal

1950—*Madhubala* with Dev Anand

1950—*Pardes* with Karan Dewan

1950—*Nirala* with Dev Anand

1950—*Nishana* with Ashok Kumar

1951—*Aaram* with Dev Anand

1951—*Badal* with Premnath

1951—*Khazana* with Nasir Khan

1951—*Saiyan* with Ajit

1951—*Nazneen* with Nasir Khan

1951—*Nadaan* with Dev Anand

1951—*Tarana* with Dilip Kumar

1952—*Sangdil* with Dilip Kumar

1952—*Saqi* with Premnath

1953—*Armaan* with Dev Anand

1953—*Rail Ka Dibba* with Shammi Kapoor

1954—*Amar* with Dilip Kumar

1954—*Bahut Din Huwe* with Swaraj

1955—*Mr. And Mrs. 55* with Guru Dutt

1955—*Naqab* with Shammi Kapoor

1955—*Nata* with Abhi Bhattacharya

1956—*Dhaka Ki Malmal* with Kishore Kumar

1956—*Rajhat* with Pradeep Kumar

1956—*Shirin Farhad* with Pradeep Kumar

1957—*Yahudi Ki Ladki* with Pradeep Kumar

1957—*Gateway of India* with Bharat Bhushan

1957—*Ek Saal* with Ashok Kumar

1958—*Baghi Siphai* with Ranjan

1958—*Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* with Kishore Kumar

1958—*Howrah Bridge* with Ashok Kumar

1958—*Phagun* with Bharat Bhushan

1958—*Police* with Pradeep Kumar

1958—*Kaala Paani* with Dev Anand

1959—*Do Ustaad* with Raj Kapoor

1959—*Insaan Jaag Utha* with Sunil Dutt

1959—*Kal Hamara Hai* with Bharat Bhushan

1960—*Barsaat Ki Raat* with Bharat Bhushan

1960—*Mehlon Ke Khwab* with Kishore Kumar

1960—*Jaali Note* with Dev Anand

1960—*Mughal-E-Azam* with Dilip Kumar

1961—*Boy Friend* with Pawar

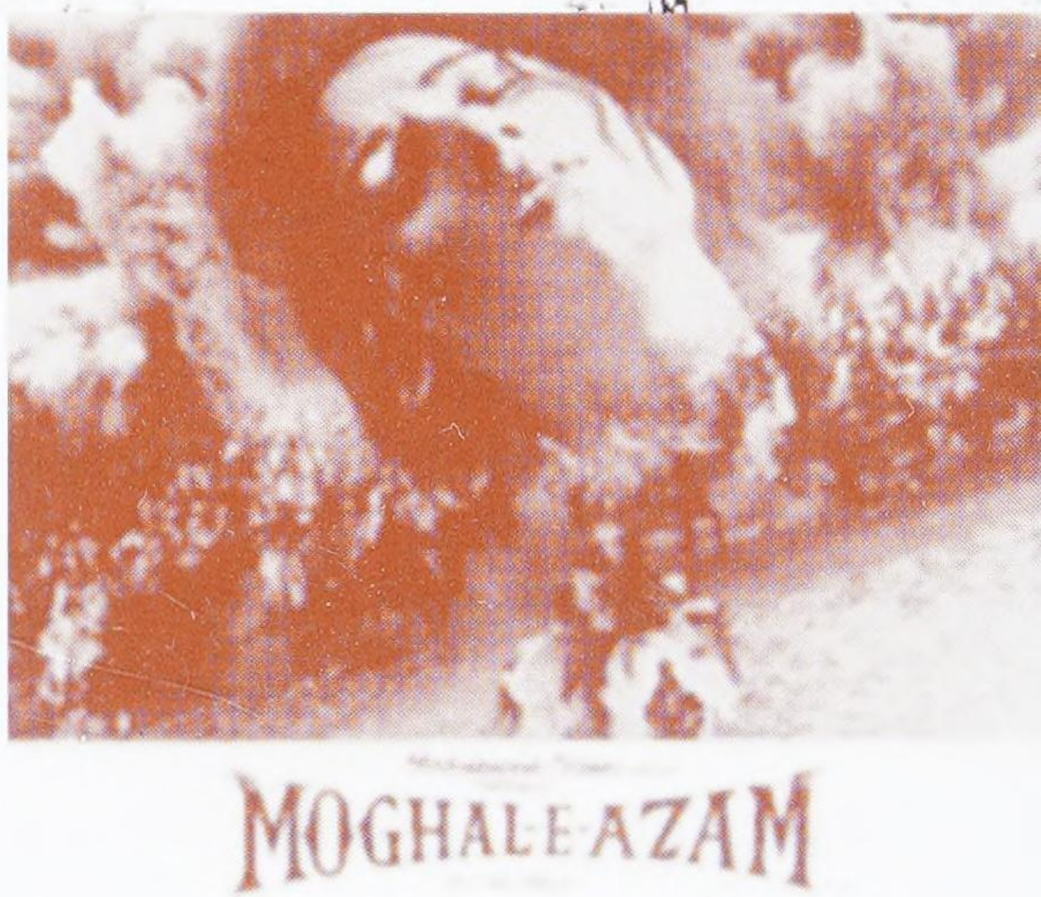
1961—*Jhumroo* with Kishore Kumar

1961—*Passport* with Pradeep Kumar

1962—*Half Ticket* with Kishore Kumar

1964—*Sharabi* with Dev Anand

1971—*Jwala* with Sunil Dutt



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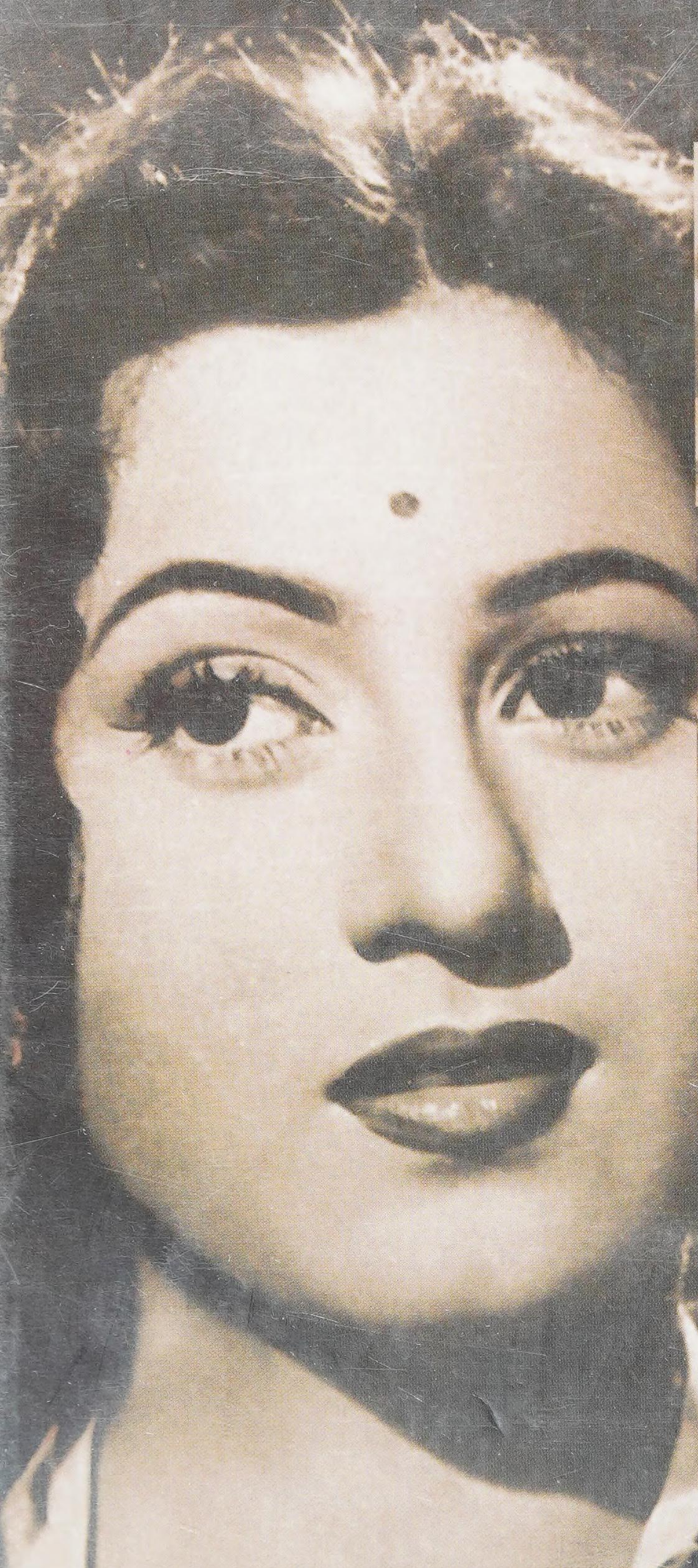

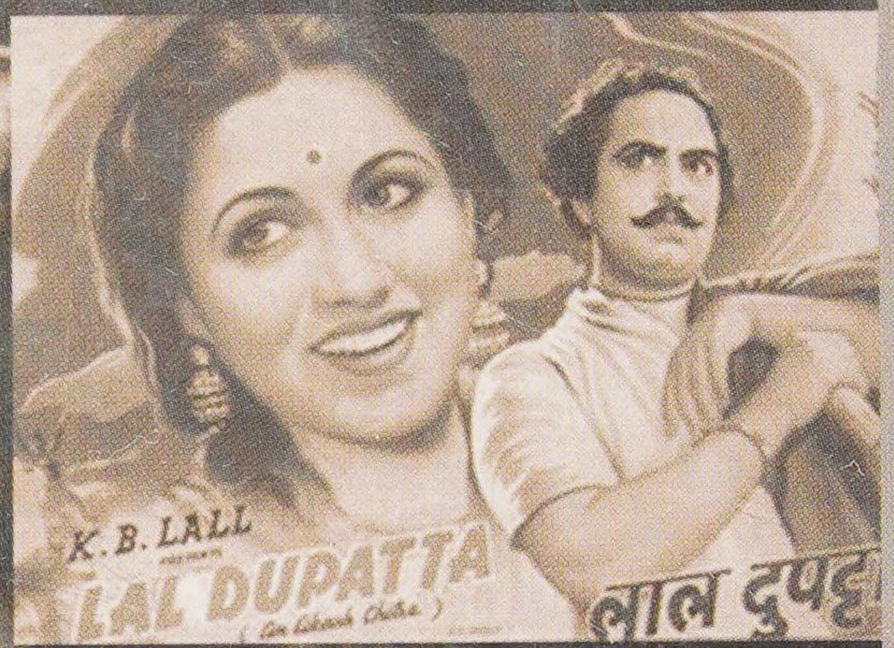

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